



The Holy See

LETTER OF THE HOLY FATHER POPE JOHN PAUL II TO THE ITALIAN BISHOPS

Dear Italian Bishops!

1. *"The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus"* (1 Cor 16:23-24).

I am pleased to greet each of you with these words of the Apostle Paul. I greet in particular the Cardinal President, Camillo Ruini, the three Vice-Presidents and the General Secretary, Archbishop Ennio Antonelli, thanking them for their commitment and the wisdom with which they put themselves at the service of your Conference.

Consider me spiritually present at this General Assembly, which is a time of grace for living more intensely Episcopal communion and your shared concern for the Church of God in Italy. To you all I express my personal gratitude for your participation in the 20th anniversary of my election to the See of Peter and the 40th of my Episcopate.

2. I am aware of your enthusiasm in guiding the preparation of your Dioceses for the Great Jubilee, which is now very close. The education of young people in the faith, the main theme of your assembly, is an essential part of this process, not only because World Youth Day will be an especially important event during the Holy Year, but also and above all because the fundamental aim of the Jubilee is to reinvigorate and relaunch, in view of the new millennium, the proclamation and witness of faith in Jesus Christ, the only Saviour of the world. This mission is entrusted in a special way to young people, who will have to shape the Christian image of future society.

With the Encyclical *Fides et ratio* I wished to recall and reflect on the intimate bond that joins the revelation of God's mystery and the human intellect. This bond can also give an impulse to the cultural project of the Italian Church and all the initiatives of social communication, to whose development you are rightly committed. Thus the younger generation can be offered a way out of the too narrow confines of their own subjectivity, discovering a common horizon of shared truth and values for which to work together.

3. In your assembly you will also deal with promoting the financial support of the Church. I wish to publicly thank you for

your generosity in coming to the aid of so many less fortunate Sister Churches and nations, in that spirit of global solidarity that is the hallmark of ecclesial communion.

I congratulate you on your Conference's new Statutes, aimed at ever more effectively supporting collegial affection and common pastoral work. This is also the purpose of the Apostolic Letter issued "Motu proprio" *Apostolos suos*, in which I sought to clarify the theological and juridical nature of Bishops' Conferences. On our mission as Bishops at the dawn of the third millennium we will have the chance to reflect more extensively together during the next Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

4. Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, I am well aware and I deeply share the loving concern with which you follow events in the beloved nation of Italy.

I am thinking, in particular, of the family based on marriage, which today is still Italy's most valuable and important resource. However, it has up to now received little assistance due to weak family policies, and indeed is subjected to numerous attacks, both culturally as well as politically, legislatively and administratively. I am thinking of the defence and promotion of human life, from its conception until its natural end. I am thinking of the school, which must regain its most noble educational objectives, in a framework of effective freedom and parity as in other European countries. I am thinking of the possibilities of work and development, which must be increased within a logic of solidarity and of appreciation for the variety of people in society, to deal with the unemployment and poverty that afflict large sectors of the population in many regions of Italy.

5. In view of these and other problems, my invitation, dear Brothers, is never to abdicate the mission that has been entrusted to us, never to give in to conformism or passing fashion, to react to every mistaken division between faith, culture and personal and social life.

By working in deep communion between ourselves and our Churches, and always proceeding with love and trust, we can help Italy not to lose its inner soul and to make good use of its renowned inheritance of faith and culture, which also is a precious good for Europe and the world.

I join you in the great prayer for Italy, which has now received a new impulse from the Shrine of Loreto, and I affectionately impart my Apostolic Blessing to you, dear Brothers in the Episcopate, and to the Churches entrusted to your pastoral care.

From the Vatican, 9 November 1998.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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